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ABSTRACT

A renovation of the English curriculum in Hartford's secondary schools is in progress, focusing on an analysis and synthesis of two elements comprising the legitimate concerns of English--that which deals with language itself (i.e., spelling and grammar), and that which involves language activities (i.e., reading and composition). Geared to slow learners, the objectives of the program are (1) to improve reading skill, and, more important, cultivate the desire to read through classroom libraries and the students' creation of reading materials; (2) to teach standard English "not as a substitute for the student's own language, but as an alternative for him to use when appropriate"; (3) to teach reluctant readers to express themselves freely through the use of aural-oral drills and informal student journals; (4) to teach literature in the last 2 years of high school within the context of a general humanities program whose purpose is to humanize and to transform the student from an observer to an active participant. (MF)

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AN ENGLISH CURRICULUM FOR THE CITY

The attached report is a truly disciplined analysis of Hartford's English-teaching problems and a description of an imaginative program which is developing.

Radically different approaches and materials, most of which have been tested in the classroom, are being created to:

1. Improve reading skill and, more important, to cultivate the desire to read (pp. 10-12)

2. Teach standard English "not as a substitute for the student's own language, but as an alternative for him to use when appropriate" (p. 14)

3. Teach reluctant writers to express themselves freely (p. 15)

4. Teach literature in the last two years of high school within the context of a general humanities program whose purpose is to humanize.

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Approved: R.C.M

TE 001 940

AN ENGLISH CURRICULUM FOR THE CITY

by Robert L. Twiss, English Curriculum Specialist

(Prepared as an address given to MAT alumni
at Wesleyan University, October 28, 1967)

I have been teaching secondary school English for seventeen years, three beginning years in the suburbs and fourteen in the city of Hartford. For three years I was chairman of the English Department at Weaver High School, but since July 1966, I have been on leave from my chairmanship in order to serve as full-time English Curriculum Specialist for the Hartford Board of Education. This is a temporary position financed under state and federal grants in an effort to improve English curriculum offerings for disadvantaged children. My work has been limited to grades seven through twelve and has most often involved the two so-called validated high schools and the nine validated elementary schools which contain seventh and eighth grades. (In Hartford, "validated" school simply means a school which qualifies for state and federal aid because of the economic situation of its student population.) During all of last year I worked alone - reading, visiting classrooms, talking with many teachers at all levels, and, finally, writing detailed proposals concerning what ought to be done. Since July, I have had working with me, full time, six Hartford English teachers who showed particular insight into curricular matters. This team and I and a number of volunteer advisory groups are now engaged in an attack on the problems of teaching English in the city.

I want to spend most of my time this afternoon telling you what we are doing and why. I want to provide you with much that is specific because, like you, I have listened to and read much which hardly goes beyond an expression of faith that the job can be done, a kind of weak cheer from the bleachers.

Before I become specific, however, I think it only fair that I set forth in general terms what I believe the teaching of English means. Many groups, many individuals, have struggled in recent years in attempts to achieve a definition of English as a school subject. Most of them have either produced an unfortunate statement or have given up in wise frustration. Even the National Council advises us to hold definition in suspense since an attempt to define English at this point may result in premature and crippling restriction. If one has accepted a commission to develop an English program for 10,000 youngsters, however, he cannot afford the luxury of indefinitely suspended judgment.

Our awareness of what English education consists has increased handsomely in the last fifteen years, and this increase has proceeded in two seemingly different directions. One direction has been toward a closer inspection of the elements of which the subject consists, and the other has been toward the discovery of unifying aspects between those constituent elements. Much of the difficulty in describing English or defining English can be traced to disparities which have developed between these two views and our relative failure to understand that both views must not only persist, but require one another. English curriculum really must be a product of both analysis and synthesis.

Let me speak first of analysis. We have always been keenly aware that English is filled with a variety of subject matter, concerning which no two teachers were in complete agreement. All of us have had English teachers in our own schooling who would devote the year to their pet elements of the subject, sometimes to our great benefit, sometimes to our abuse. So we have had English teachers who do little else than teach literature or grammar or (more rarely because it is more difficult) composition. (At least it must be said all of these were English teachers; I once had a colleague who is remembered for nothing so much as her efforts at teaching parliamentary procedure.) Into this foggy situation have jumped administrators who, even

though they knew they wanted kids to read and write, were often subjected to other pressures, and since English is taken by all pupils, it served as a dumping ground for miscellaneous units of work which have no business in an English course. It is partly as a rebellion against such practices and partly as imitation of what is going on in other curricular areas that English teachers have started to look more closely not only at what elements are legitimate parts of English but at those elements themselves.

Well, what are the legitimate components of English? I submit to you that they are of two kinds: components which deal with language itself and components which involve language activities. Under the first category - language - come such matters as spelling, punctuation, grammar, language history and etymology, and dictionary usage. Under the second category - language activities - come those subjects associated with elementary schools, reading and writing, and those subjects associated with secondary schools, literature and composition, and the two subjects which should be omnipresent, speaking and listening. Virtually all other content should be locked out of a legitimate English program.

To continue the process of analysis - what of the nature of the components themselves? Of what do they consist; how do they operate? Of some, such as reading, we know a great deal - or at least think that we do. Of others, such as listening, we know virtually nothing and seem proud of our ignorance. Much of what we call reading consists of the exercise of certain well-identified skills. We know that these skills can be taught and learned and we even have some idea of the order in which they may be taught and learned - which is the same as saying that we can construct a reading program. We are learning how to do something similar with writing or composition. Not only should some simpler composition exercises precede more complex ones but certain mental concepts and processes need to precede or accompany all writing. And the mental processes need to be taught, not just assumed. In literature we think we have a clearer notion of what is

valid than English teachers have ever had. The era of the chronological survey, author biography, literary trivia (talk about literature) has given way to the close reading of the text itself under the influence of the no-longer-so-new critics, and more recently under the influence of Northrup Fry (as well as some smaller ones) there has developed a sharpened appreciation for form. At least we are now intent on studying the literature itself and no one would probably suggest a return to other concerns. Perhaps most importantly, especially in the secondary schools, we are seeing literature as part of the humanizing process - so much so that many of us are willing to say that we read literature to learn what it means to be a human being. In the area of grammar, we are more concerned with rules which truthfully describe English, not only as it stands but as it moves. Further we have had the courage to defend the teaching of grammar as a cultural art and are developing the means to make grammar relevant to other language processes.

Those of you who teach outlining will remember that I had spoken of two distinct directions in which our awareness of English is carrying us. I have been speaking of that direction which carried us in search of the legitimate components and an analysis of the nature of each component. The other direction I had mentioned was synthesis.

We have become disillusioned concerning assumed automatic connections between the various strands of English and so there has been a healthy rebellion against the assumption that knowledge of grammar (any kind) will automatically make anybody a better speaker, writer, or reader. There has also been a rebellion against the writing assignments which make the English teacher into a social scientist and give youngsters the notion that there is nothing within our own field worth writing about. We have not rejected the possibility of unity itself, however, and we find ourselves in fervent search for the legitimate, functional associations which must exist in language activity. Once we have found real components, perhaps we can find

real connections. So, we are trying to build programs which capitalize on natural connections between the various strands which make up the subject English. All of this is good, so long as we remember to be reasonable about it. Part of being reasonable is to remember our ignorance concerning what the legitimate connections are. Certainly no unifying factor will ever match the alert intelligence of the warm well-educated teacher who knows both subject and youngsters and thereby sees the magnificent possibilities.

I have taken the first ten minutes satisfying my own need to express my biases, and I hope you will pardon me. At any rate you have now paid the price of admission to the main show - English curriculum development in Hartford.

Curriculum revision in Hartford really began with a need to spend a great deal of federal money and to spend it wisely. Hartford has no English coordinator and one day in December the secondary director came to my office at Weaver and asked me to help him spend a lot of this windfall for English. It was obvious to him and to me that a good way to spend money is to tool up - to buy a lot of things you know that you have needed for some time and will undoubtedly need for a long time to come. Along with the chairmen from the other high schools, we began to puzzle out exactly what these things were. We knew we had tremendous needs in several areas but that the most apparent need was in the area of reading - both for materials with which to teach reading skills and for more suitable literature to read along the way. With the help of the reading department we identified many reading skill materials we thought could be used with high school youngsters - materials which were easy to read and highly motivating, materials designed to improve comprehension and word attack skills. These reading materials were tentatively placed in grades where we thought they would work best. We also wanted materials of inherent value which although they might not be identified as reading skill materials would, we felt, stimulate youngsters to practice their growing skills as well as teach some of the values associated with literature. For

these purposes we purchased some well-known anthologies which would be read in the classroom and for each youngster we ordered a periodical such as Read Magazine, Scope, Reader's Digest, or a daily newspaper. We recognized our opportunity to buy much needed dictionaries (appropriately graded) and we took it. Our biggest job, however, and the one which has produced the most long-run satisfaction, was the creation of twelve different classroom libraries, two for each grade, one for our lowest ability grouping and one for our general grouping, for a total of 160 units. The sizes of these libraries varied from 125 to 150 volumes and contained approximately 50 titles in paperback for psychological reasons as well as to lower cost. But we knew that we would not have money for replacements and we had to think largely in terms of bound books. To house all of these materials in the classrooms we purchased large steel cabinets to hold the materials assigned to a given grade and ability grouping. We also purchased well-made wooden bookcases on casters which could be used for a variety of purposes, but would be especially useful for the display of the classroom library or of selections from it.

After many years of teaching with inadequate materials, Hartford English teachers were suddenly deluged in the fall of 1966 with more materials than they could use in any given year, and it was difficult at first for some of them to realize that it was not necessary to use all of the material with any one class. Furthermore, some of the material could not be used effectively without a degree of expertise and without some preliminary diagnosis of class and individual deficiencies.

To solve the in-service training problem we enlisted the aid of the chairmen and the reading consultants all over the city. As teachers were checked out on various materials, the materials were released for use. This sounds neater than it actually was, but we forgave ourselves many errors as teacher and pupil morale improved. At least and at last attention was being paid to sore needs.

Some of you will object that all of this was done backwards. You are

quite right, but the very real "Alice in Wonderland" of federal aid does have a way of accomplishing ends which would easily remain unattainable through other more reasonable means. You see, what happened was that all of these materials began to cry out for a program into which they might fit. As one administrator noted, we had cabinets full of medicine and little knowledge of how to write prescriptions.

It was at this point in history that some highly placed person whom I have not yet identified decided to remove me from my comfortable spot at Weaver, give me a quick diploma as doctor of English medicine, and commission me to start writing prescriptions.

The first task to which I addressed myself was the most desperate one - that of preparing a program for our supposedly slowest pupils. In Hartford we call these youngsters "personals." When these classes were originally created nearly eighteen years ago, they were small classes for what we then thought of as youngsters who learned slowly and who needed personal attention in order to help remedy learning deficiencies. In our Hartford publication "Guidelines to Student Grouping" we continue to warn that "Teachers and counselors should avoid assigning to this group students who are merely lazy or who actually have disciplinary problems rather than basic learning disabilities." And we have encouraged teachers to help these pupils "to enter the mainstream of English language education" by removal to general English. We have recognized that personal youngsters will be from two to six years behind in reading skills and that they often score between 80 and 89 on the Lorge-Thorndike test of verbal ability, an IQ test. The personal course for years consisted of "simplified" formal grammar, minimum expectations concerning composition output, and "literary" offerings made up largely of condensed novels.

Each year as more and more Negro pupils filled these classes (many of them immigrants from the South), the situation became less and less tenable. Each year teachers reported greater difficulties in using the prescribed

materials, and what I call "the great cycling down process" began. Even the low standards which had been established in the original conception began to crumble. Teachers expected less, pupils performed less, teachers expected less, etc. Meanwhile, the typical youngster in these classes, especially in the large northend of the city (two of three high schools), was developing characteristics which were not then to be found in any printed description. Observation began to reveal that this youngster enters school with a noticeable verbal deficiency which becomes relatively exaggerated as he proceeds through the grades; that he is the youngster who grows to have sometimes bitterly negative attitudes toward schools, teachers, and books; that he is used to failure as a way of life; that he doesn't read except when required to do so and then not well; that he cannot compose even a few sentences without betraying the fact that he is largely illiterate; that he operates exclusively within a social dialect which is not found acceptable in the mainstream of American life; that he may have much more intelligence than he shows if a way could be found for him to exercise it. And so, into the seventh grade was coming this bitter and non-verbal youngster and in our desire to make things simple enough for him we were helping to insure that he would stay bitter and non-verbal. It was apparent that any new program had to be based on a realistic assessment of the youngster as he arrived in the seventh grade, coupled with a program which assumed that he could become much, much more than what he seemed to be.

We began looking for solutions. The half-dozen linguists in this country who had not gone to MIT or devoted their lives to writing a grammar of lower Ubangi were finding something both educationally and socially significant in the dialect of the Negro /merican. Men like McDavid, Loban, Stewart, and Labov were isolating dialectal differences between standard and Negro speech, and Loban's long-range study provided substantial clues concerning which patterns or structures refused to yield as the youngster passed through childhood and into adolescence. These changing and persisting dialectal

differences provided possible solutions to learning problems which had been assumed to be reading problems or lack of basic intelligence.

Contrast, if you will, the different tasks facing a middle class first grader who has been hearing and speaking nothing but standard English for six years and the youngster who may never have thought of standard English as an operating tongue. Whose language is the first grader asked to learn to read? Whose phonetic system is he taught? And what stories and what characters is he asked to consider important and real? The wonder is that so many Negro pupils do learn to read! We should probably be wise to postpone reading for non-standard speakers for a year or two or three while we concentrate on concept education and exposure to standard English as a second dialect. A minimum essential in learning to read is being able to understand the teacher's standard English. Such changes in program are beyond my responsibility, however, and the immediate question was and is likely to remain for some time, what to do with seventh graders who may be reading on a second or third grade level and whose lack of the verbal skills dooms them as early dropouts in almost any secondary school program. William Labov and his associates at Columbia have uncovered objective evidence of another problem which faces us in teaching the inner-city adolescent. These men have shown recently that in addition to structural conflicts between standard and non-standard English there are functional conflicts which denigrate learnings. These studies have traced the learning progress of pupils who are members of street clubs in Harlem and those who are not, and have shown that membership in a street club and the association with the values of the club disassociates the child from a desire to learn to read. Careful studies show that club members have just as high a potential but that they simply are not interested in matters academic because the peer group does not value such skills. It is important to note, by the way, that all evidence indicates that the adult Negro community values education and supports educational objectives as strongly as the adults in any community.

We can no longer assume that all of those youngsters whom we have classified as slow learners, really are slow learners, or that cultural deprivation is a social and economic force with uniform meaning.

What should we do? Hartford has launched a reasoned, eclectic program. We are teaching reading skills but we recognize that no reading program should either begin or end with reading skills. In fact if the goal of a reading program should become limited to the teaching of skills, the program would almost certainly fail with most adolescent boys and girls. Seventh graders have, after all, been exposed to reading skills for at least six years and will resent a continuation of easily identifiable elementary instruction although that may be "what they need." It is vital that the teaching of reading skills be cleverly disguised or at least accompanied by reading material which is both abundant and interesting. Adolescent youngsters who have had years of difficulty with reading will show significant improvement only after they have decided that reading "ain't so bad." Our program, therefore, tries to tempt and finally win over the reluctant reader with an abundance of reading materials freed from the conventional restrictions associated with reading for English class. Specifically we made the purpose of the classroom libraries clear to teachers as follows:

> The purpose of these classroom libraries is to stimulate more extensive individual reading. We know that many youngsters in these classes seldom use the school or public libraries on their own initiative. The classroom library makes it possible for teachers to help youngsters select books on the proper reading level, ensuring a much higher possibility of reading success for each youngster. Every care must be taken that youngsters do not feel compelled to read any particular book. This means that if a youngster starts a book but does not wish to finish it, he should be allowed to take another book. Formal book report procedures should never be used in such a way as to decrease reading interest..... etc.

But even with the libraries, the periodicals, and a few other shorter pieces of material such as Springboards, we were far from satisfied with the material for reading which we had available for our personal groups.

This summer we set out to remedy the situation in part. One member of the new English team was commissioned to spend a year looking for readable

materials of the highest possible quality and if necessary creating material herself. Her first project involved the creation of reading materials.

For many years as a standard remedial device, very poor readers were allowed to record a few sentences delivered orally and then to try to read their own material after it had been transcribed. It is also an elementary technique in standard classrooms to take a walk or engage in some other activity and then to return to the classroom where a description or a story concerning the activity is written jointly by the teacher and the class. Our modification of these techniques was to select seven rather verbal eighth graders from Hartford's northend to attend, with pay, a unique summer class. A program was established for these youngsters which was operated by an expert counsellor who had specialized in small group counselling a young Negro college student, and the team member who, as she puts it, served cokes and did the transcribing. The youngsters were taken on interesting trips within the city sometimes into the downtown area, sometimes into the worst slums, sometimes into the finest residential neighborhoods. Often they were told before leaving that they were to make believe that they were ambassadors from Ghana, or some such device. When they returned, the counsellor stimulated dialogue concerning the experience. The dialogue was taped and later transcribed. Not only did we get stimulating and natural dialogue, but we had rather automatic controls on interest and on language itself. Perhaps I should note that it was not always necessary to stimulate dialogue. Sometimes the events of the summer were amply stimulating in themselves as we discovered on mornings after serious riots in Hartford's northend when our pupils simply wanted to talk and talk about the evening's experience.

These dialogues are now being made into edited readings which keep the naturalness of dialect but which are shortened and focused in such a way that we believe that they will be extremely tempting and stimulating reading to other youngsters of similar age and background. The edited dialogues are being retaped by a group of boys so that when the teacher wishes, the classes

may follow the printed word as they hear it; in this way we are hoping to recapture much of the vigor and realism of the original.

The same teacher who is responsible for these tapes is searching many sources for other materials which may prove useful for these same youngsters. She has uncovered short stories, simple plays published in booklets, a publication of "Peanuts" in very unusual form, and several anthologies of materials available with accompanying records. The seventh and eighth grades have proven very difficult to locate material for, but the job becomes somewhat simpler in the senior high, where it is possible to use more commercially prepared materials.

Another project is being developed in oral English.

Previous efforts have been to teach language skills to Negro youngsters without any organized attempt to help them achieve skill in standard English. As a matter of fact many influential groups and individuals prefer to argue that no such thing as Negro dialect exists in this country. William Labov puts the situation very cogently:[1]

> For those who have not participated in such debates, it may be difficult to imagine how great are the pressures against the recognition, description, or even mention of Negro speech patterns. For various reasons, many teachers, principals, and civil rights leaders wish to deny that the existence of patterns of Negro speech is a linguistic and social reality in the United States today. The most careful statement of the situation as it actually exists might read as follows: Many features of pronunciation, grammar and lexicon are closely associated with Negro speakers - so closely as to identify the great majority of Negro people in the Northern cities by their speech alone.

Even admitting the many individual exceptions which all of us would wish to make to such a generalization, there remain millions of individual Negroes of whom it is true. No complete description of Negro dialect exists, just as there is no complete description of standard English. Yet enough is known so that we can list many of the more significant differences.

I have time for only a few specific examples:

1. The most important single grammatical difference between Negro dialect and standard centers around the use of the verb <u>to</u>

be. Thus:

I is you friend for I am your friend Simple present

I be you friend for I'll be your friend Simple future

You was my friend for You were my friend Simple past

The second example here "I be you friend" illustrates the frequent connection between grammatical and phonological differences. The "I be you friend" results from the characteristic non-sounding of l's and is thus a conversion from "I'll be your friend." In the same way the you is a conversion from your due to a failure to pronounce r's.

2. A second and very significant grammatical difference is a failure to distinguish a past tense of regular verbs:

I walk to school yesterday.

3. Another is the failure to achieve subject-verb agreement, especially in the third person singular where, after all, regular verbs add an s. A simple present conjugation in dialect would be:

I jump...you jump...he jump...we jump...you jump...they jump

The same practice follows in irregulars and the result is even more confusing for the standard speaker:

I run...you run...he run...etc.

To this list one must add many, many other characteristics involving the possessive case, the double pluralization of irregular plurals (the mens), confusion of pronoun forms and cases.

What should this mean to a modern program in English for these youngsters? The reasoning of our team member conducting this project is as follows: "Much current research suggests that language structure is acquired by children primarily in their preschool years. The child whose environmental language is essentially nonstandard has learned the patterns of that language long before he is exposed to standard English in the classroom situation. His language meets his needs and enables him to cope with his environment;

indeed, without it he may be ostracized by his peers. The English program, if it is to be meaningful to this student, must teach him respect for all kinds of language as reflections of the people who use them. It must further enable him to become proficient in standard English as a vehicle for social and economic mobility, while recognizing the effectiveness and validity of his own cultural patterns of communication. But before these attitudes can be built into the child they must be honestly present in his teachers. The teacher who treats any form other than standard English as 'wrong,' 'inferior,' 'incorrect,' or 'ignorant,' is unlikely to be successful either in developing the student's own sense of personal worth or in helping him gain facility in standard English. It is from this philosophical position that we are approaching the teaching of standard English not as a substitute for the student's own language but as an alternative for him to use when appropriate."

We are taking a major step in the direction of meeting these goals through the creation of taped oral-aural drills which teach grammatical and sentence patterns without reference to grammatical terminology. Presently we project a series of 60 ten minute drills, each designed to work on specific problems. We have already completed the first ten of these unique drills, which we are recommending be used every school day in seventh and eighth grades at the beginning of the period.

For example: the first three drills take up the following matters -

1. The standard use of the verb <u>be</u> in the present tense with <u>I</u> as subject (standard and contracted forms).
2. The standard use of the verb <u>be</u> in the present tense with <u>you</u> as subject (standard and contracted forms).
3. The standard use of the verb <u>be</u> in the present tense with <u>he</u>, <u>she</u>, <u>it</u> as subjects (standard and contracted forms).

A third involvement of our new personal curriculum has been a <u>writing</u>

program planned to reenforce both the language and reading programs. One concern of the writing sequence is to reenforce the oral program in language patterns. This will usually be done by having youngsters write two or three responses following the aural-oral drills - responses to patterns they have just dealt with and responses from previously covered patterns.

Another phase of writing is entirely unstructured and uninhibited - the journal.

One obvious difficulty with the pattern drills and formal assignments is that, necessary as they are, they seem to provide no way of really getting at a youngster's lack of concern for composition, his unwillingness to value it. Even if we should succeed in greatly improving his sentences and in eliminating many of his grammatical errors, he may still be a non-writer. To offset the emphasis on correctness which pervades pattern work, we have suggested that in the seventh and eighth grades (and possibly beyond) youngsters be required to keep a journal. The technique described by Daniel N. Fader in his paperback Hooked On Books was carefully considered. At a regular junior high and at a boys' penal school, Dr. Fader worked on a reading program which emphasized free choice and ample reading materials. One of the most successful parts of this program was a requirement that each boy keep a journal under rules similar to the following:

1. At least two pages of writing must be completed each week, but there is no limit.
2. The teacher may read but will never correct what is written.
3. The teacher will never show a student's paper to anyone without permission.
4. There is no rule against copying to fill the page.

Dr. Fader got some very gratifying results from such a plan, and in the short time we have been using it in Hartford we have already received good reports. A teacher at one of the high schools told me the other day that his sophomore personals had started the year by copying materials to fill the pages, but as

the romance of copying started to wear off they began to write little stories about themselves in a most realistic vein. At least they are beginning to value written language as a means of doing something important for themselves - a rather recent notion for most of them.

Hopefully, the oral and written approach to sentence and grammatical patterns, on the one hand, and the permissive approach to journal writing, on the other, will bring about that synthesis of skill and willingness which might turn non-writers into writers.

Other members of our team are working on the development of a general curriculum. While much that I have said, particularly in the areas of language and writing will influence the general curriculum, there will obviously be differences in such matters as reading selections and in the general standards of expectation. Most of our generals in Hartford are reading one or two years below grade level when they enter the ninth grade. They share with the personals many of the characteristic attitudes I described earlier except that we believe they have more potential, as indeed they must, since a substantial percentage of these graduates go on to further education. In five different classrooms in four schools we have been piloting the Hunter College Gateway materials being published by Macmillan. These materials were developed under a grant from the USOE under a commission to develop a program for normal 7, 8, 9th graders who fail to progress in English because of cultural handicaps. The Gateway materials consist of four soft-bound anthologies with real literature in them for each year, a recording which includes most of the poetry selections as well as ballads and a few other pieces, overhead transparencies for language and composition instruction, a comprehensive cook-book type teachers manual (the best of its kind), and student workbooks available in either printed or ditto master form.

All of the evidence both from the original Hunter College pilots and from our own seventh grade experiences indicates that both the materials themselves and the general philosophy behind their development is sound and

is inspiring learning in many previously reluctant pupils provided they are of normal functioning intelligence. We anticipate using this series in many of our Hartford schools in grades seven and eight and developing our own similar programs in grades nine and ten.

For our junior and senior youngsters in both the personal and general ability groupings, we are contemplating a departure from traditional concepts. A humanities program for average and slow youngsters, taught in classes which would be a mixture of these upperclassmen, has been described to staff as follows by the team member responsible for it.

"The course is intended to awaken students to the many-sided experiences which are often summarized in the word <u>culture</u>. More important, however, it is hoped that something to fulfill the human side of being will occur, for this is a curriculum of concern - concern for the human state, concern for the fact of daily life, for a man's history and his responsibility to influence that history. No longer is he only the observer, the maneuvered or the victim, but he is an active participant who must help sway the course of history and change the blemished patterns that have preceded him. The success of this kind of study can only be measured in years to come; only generations of behavior can begin to reflect what we are about, what we hope to accomplish in the minds of our students, but the failures of current history alone suggest that it is worthwhile to establish a student program of involvement with the things - good and bad - that are related to or are the products of civilization. The integration of many facets of life, the arousal of visibility, the knowing and the seeing and the understanding, are the places at which we begin. And language (in all its vivid and intimate variation), as <u>the</u> human achievement, is the point where human identity begins, the first visible necessity to experience humanly.

"The strength of this course lies in the teacher's freedom to think, to move, to involve himself with the fearful and the fearless, to direct and to lead wherever human concern must go. He must not be frozen into any tradition,

any limitation - except the framework which his students begin with; thus we are relying for basic artistic experiences upon visual means, largely the motion picture in its best contemporary manifestations, to overcome individual skill limitation. The teacher has many possible directions to follow - books, dialogues, analyses, and criticisms - and he should in no way be limited by the worked-out directions of the program of study. A class situation does a great deal more to stimulate than paper-drawn specification.

"A number of units have been worked out in detail, in fact enough to cover what we envision as a two-year, two-period a day course, but the teacher will individually select from these units according to his own taste and class situation. We have begun with contemporary events, but we hope that the discussion and reading may lead to the past, a history that builds back from where we are now. From themes of language to war (the failure of language?) to Civil Rights to the American romance, to the individual himself, we may be reiterating the past - but the modern dialogue from Mississippi to Detroit to Vietnam has a fresh validity, and we must never lose sight of that or we will lose the meaning of our humanistic aim.

"The course of study is divided into ten parts (units), five for each year, and materials have been carefully selected from literature and visual-audio media to suggest the multiplicity of cultural life as well as to involve the students in the experience of civilization."

It should come as no surprise that a school system working hard to improve its curriculum for average and below-average deprived youngsters should also be working on its college preparatory curriculum. For many years Hartford has prepared students for the finest colleges and universities in the nation. Now we realize that a program which appealed successfully to middle-class college-bound students may not be equally effective with potential college-bound youngsters from the inner-city. Our present college curriculum is therefore being completely rethought. We expect to emerge with a program which will be a better one not only for our underprivileged but for everyone.

We are also planning the establishment of special elevator classes at each grade which will encourage the general youngster of high potential to enter the college preparatory program.

The New York based Academy of American Poets and the Board of Education of New York have worked out an arrangement to bring some of the nation's most distinguished young poets into city classrooms. Each poet is required to keep a journal of his visits. A brief quote from Robert David Cohen - March 24, 1966:[2]

> He had completed a reading of modern American poetry to a class of bright students in the ninth grade.
>
> I ask for questions. Pause. No one wants to be first.
>
> Then the questions: for example, Do poets write poems for money? (Does he ask that because I'm wearing a blue suit? I wonder.) How can I get my poems published? Are poems copyrighted? I try to answer but at the same time show them how the questions they've asked are peculiar, to say the least. Other questions indicate a great interest in how poems get written, what mood was I in when I wrote that poem, what do I do, get an idea, a feeling, and write it down? Questions like that. But even though they seemed a little interested in poets they seemed to be rather unaffected by the poems themselves.
>
> Afternoon. I am prepared for the worst. This class, I have been told earlier, is the slowest in the seventh grade. The average reading level is fourth grade. I am not surprised to find that the entire class is Negro....I get depressed by inexorable and sick economics, the sociology of the underprivileged. I do not expect them to care about poetry, why should they, I wonder, what is poetry good for, anyway?
>
> A capsule: the reading goes beautifully. The young people of this class are alive. They can hardly contain themselves. They are a little noisy. They giggle at the word "naked" which was in one of the poems. They ask innocent and meaningful questions, not about publishing or moneymaking, but about the poems. What does it mean? And so on. I sense that they are confused and happy; they are confused because they've been taught (in school) to think that poetry is for sissies and describes another world; happy because they feel the beauty of it, and somehow it makes sense to them. What a good feeling I have!

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1 William Labov, "Some Sources of Reading Problems for Negro Speakers of Nonstandard English," New Directions in Elementary English, National Council of Teachers of English, 1967, pp. 140-167.

2 "Poets in the Classroom," The Urban Review, June 1967, pp. 21-28.